

Recognizing the Contributions of Women, Past and Present

By Stephanie Herseth Sandlin

This week, Congress held its celebration in honor of Women's History Month. During this month, I'm reminded of the tremendous contributions women have made throughout history, as well as the progress women are making every day to fight for and ensure equality.

Prior to the official recognition of Women's History Month, many schools and communities established week-long celebrations honoring the contribution of American women. However, Congress did not officially establish a National Women's History Week until 1981. After growing support for Women's History Week, Congress passed a resolution in 1987 extending it to the whole month of March.

This month highlights the struggle of women fighting for equality. Throughout our country's history, women have sought to ensure their voices were heard. These courageous women certainly made their mark, by demanding the right to an education, to hold property, and to vote. Given the vast difference in social norms and accepted behavior for women, one cannot underestimate the courage it took to demand that society grant certain rights and freedoms many of us take for granted today.

More recently, women have fought, and many continue in this struggle, to ensure fairness and equality in the work place. These women have put their careers and their reputations on the line to point out injustice in their place of work. However, our economy and society rely upon women in all sectors of our workforce, and its important, not only for progress, but for our economy, that their contributions are adequately recognized.

But, it's not just the women who've made headlines that we remember during Women's History Month. Perhaps the most deserving of recognition during Women's History Month are those who every day must balance the demands of family and community, with professional demands. In fact, South Dakota has one of the highest percentages in the country of families in which both parents work. Even without the awards or recognition, these women are heroes and history-makers in their own right, and Women's History Month provides an opportunity to recognize them as well.

This month is important in recognizing the foundational role American women have played in shaping our country's history. However, their role is not always recognized and honored as it should be. For the sake of future generations reflecting on how this country came to be, it's important that we seek to correct the record, and rightfully acknowledge the sacrifices and bravery of women in our country's history.